

**Remarks by Michael S. Owen
Ambassador of the United States of America
to the Republic of Sierra Leone**

**U.S. Independence Day Reception
U.S. Embassy Atrium
Monday, July 4, 2011**

- *The Honorable J. B. Dauda, Foreign Minister of the Republic of Sierra Leone; honorable Ministers, Parliamentarians, Members of the diplomatic corps, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.*
- I am pleased to welcome you here for the celebration of the **two hundredth and thirty-fifth anniversary** of the signing of the American Declaration of Independence.
- Our Declaration of Independence embodies the hopes of our Founding Fathers and their enduring belief in basic human rights and democratic principles, and it continues to inspire all Americans.
- It continues to inspire not only Americans, but many of our friends throughout the world. Because the principles of democracy are fundamentally **IN**clusive, not exclusive.
- The United States is a nation of immigrants. For those of you who have visited our larger cities, you know that a simple walk down the street will bring you face to face with people from virtually every nation on earth.
- In fact, it is safe to say that there is no such thing as a typical American. It is this multi-cultural aspect of American society that we are also here to celebrate.
- And there is no better place than Sierra Leone to celebrate the rich heritage of Africans in the United States. Recent evidence strongly supports the fact that the ancestors of many prominent African-Americans – including Martin Luther King, Jr. – may have come from these very shores.

- The contributions these Americans made to American society are even more impressive when we remember that they are rooted in the terrible legacy of the Atlantic slave trade. Indeed, it was the descendants of these first ***unwilling*** immigrants who had the courage to overcome their past and make a unique mark on the history and culture of the United States.
- Most encouragingly, Sierra Leoneans continue to distinguish themselves in America. From athletics to academics, from the football gridiron to the campus classroom, many people who started their lives in Sierra Leone have now become ... Americans.
- And – especially during this 50th year of Sierra Leone’s independence – many of these ***“Salone-Americans”*** are coming back to Africa.
- They have come back with ideas. They have come back with passion. They have come back with a unique understanding of our two countries.
- These returnees are living symbols of the deep and enduring friendship between the people of the United States and Sierra Leone – and the American Embassy is committed to working with them to advance our mutual interests.

- Tonight, as we look toward the future, I am also proud to look back at what the United States has already accomplished in cooperation with the government and people of Sierra Leone.
- Since my arrival last September, I have had the opportunity to visit almost every province in Sierra Leone. In each place, I have seen examples of projects supported by the United States or private American organizations.
- The Embassy has recently expanded its staff to include a full-time USAID Country Representative and our first ever Economic Officer. We have also launched initiatives to reach out to the Sierra Leonean diaspora, and have created an American Chamber of Commerce in Freetown.

- In March, we hosted the first-ever delegation of 12 American women representing U.S. technology companies interested in doing business in Sierra Leone.
- I plan to continue to work very closely with American companies, and individual investors who want to come to Sierra Leone, to establish businesses, trade and invest, and create jobs. We will do all we can to establish partnerships, make linkages, and put people together who have a vision for business that can advance economic prosperity in Sierra Leone.
- While on the subject of business, there is no better time than now to thank the American, local, and international businesses whose generosity has made tonight's reception possible.
- Our supporters are: Air France/KLM/Delta Airlines; Anadarko; BSI; First Step/Africa Felix Juice; JPI; Prime Logistics; Sam King Group; SDC Rentals; Sierra Leone Brewery; and the U.S./Sierra Leone Chamber of Commerce.
- We appreciate your involvement and look forward to working with you to expand economic opportunities in Sierra Leone.
- On November 3rd of this year, USAID will mark its 50th anniversary. Fifty years ago, President Kennedy called for the creation of an agency that would support economic opportunity and democratic freedom for all people as central to America's domestic security, prosperity and national conscience.
- Those principles are still at the forefront of our development programs. In Sierra Leone, agricultural productivity projects supported by USAID have provided assistance to more than 14,000 rural households, as well as providing training to over 5,000 farmers and producers' organizations.
- Last year, USAID launched a 5-year sustainable nutrition and agriculture program at a cost of \$12 million annually. The program is supporting more than 45,000 Sierra Leonean families through improved access to health services, clean water, and fortified food.

- In addition, this year, USAID committed more than six million dollars towards supporting inclusive elections, rule of law, and effective local government institutions that will broaden political participation in Sierra Leone, particularly among women and the handicapped.
- We are also promoting civic education, judicial reform, and the strengthened capacity of local government officials to deliver better community services.
- The high level of cooperation between the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces and the United States Department of Defense is also very encouraging. In the past year, the U.S. Africa Command has sponsored a number of ship visits to Freetown by U.S. Navy and Coast Guard vessels – and continues to provide training and assistance programs for our Sierra Leonean military counterparts.
- The U.S. Government has also provided training and support to Sierra Leonean troops participating in the peacekeeping mission in Darfur, Sudan – and we look forward to expanding this program in the coming year.
- In the past year, we have also welcomed the Peace Corps' return to Sierra Leone, and we have celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of Peace Corps.
- We now have two groups of volunteers in country, with one group already teaching in rural areas and a second group now in training. More than anything else, these young volunteers – who live and work in the same environment as their colleagues and students – epitomize the friendship between our nations.

- This is also a time to recognize the achievements of our hosts – the government and people of Sierra Leone. In April, as you marked the 50th anniversary of Sierra Leone's independence, we were proud to celebrate

with you. We share your optimism and enthusiasm for the future, and are happy to see tangible improvements in many sectors.

- Among the most important milestones on the horizon are the national elections in 2012. History has shown, time and again, that countries which follow a democratic path also find the way to greater economic prosperity, public health, and security.
- Democracies do not make war on one another. Democracies promote the health and welfare of their own citizens and realize that the true power lies in the hands of its people, whose energies and creativities must be free to speak, innovate, invest, and build a better future for all.
- And so, as we come full circle -- back to the guiding principles of the Declaration which founded our nation -- I ask you to join me in a toast to the health and well-being of His Excellency, Ernest Bai Koroma, President of the Republic of Sierra Leone, and to the people of Sierra Leone – and the enduring friendship between our two nations.